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I am committed to protecting Alabama's forests and natural treasures. In April 2000, I appointed 63 members of the Alabama Commission on Environmental Initiatives to research and develop quality options to encourage the long-term preservation of Alabama's natural environment. Since that time, the commission has conducted a series of 12 town meetings to gain input from citizens, while the members developed plans to protect our natural treasures.

The commission has since made 40 recommendations that will help us protect our lakes, rivers and forests. A number deal specifically with ideas for protecting Alabama's forests. The entire report is available online courtesy of Jacksonville State University at <http://www.jsu.edu/depart/epic/ACEIreport.htm>.

The commission stresses their support for the Clean Water Action Plan, which was designed to protect public health and restore our nation's precious waterways. This plan charts a new course by emphasizing collaborative strategies built around watersheds and the communities they sustain. Alabama's commission is already working to develop a water withdrawal system for our state.

They also suggest a comprehensive state plan for environmental education to assure that Alabamians understand the importance of our natural treasures and the consequences of actions that may harm them. Such programs would focus on schools but also reach out to the general public.

I am personally committed to improving environmental education in this state. I certainly appreciate the commission's hard work in developing its recommendations, and I will keep you updated on our progress. These recommendations are just the first step. We will continue to work in order to protect our forests and all of Alabama's environmental treasures.

We are all so blessed to be able to call ourselves Alabamians. We live in a great state rich in natural resources and wonderful people. Sometimes, however, we take this for granted. I received the following in an e-mail from my mother recently, and wanted to share it with you. It truly puts things in perspective.

Putting Things into Perspective

If we could shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look something like the following. There would be:

- 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere, both North and South Americas, and 8 Africans
- 52 would be female; 48 would be male; 70 would be non-white; 30 would be white
- 6 people would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth and all 6 would be from the United States.
- 80 would live in substandard housing; 70 would be unable to read; 50 would suffer from malnutrition; 1 would be near death; 1 would be near birth; 1 (yes, only 1) would have a college education; 1 would own a computer

When one considers our world from such a compressed perspective, the need for both acceptance, understanding and education becomes glaringly apparent. This is also something to ponder . . .

- If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week.
- If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.
- If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than 3 billion people in the world.
- If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world.
- If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.
- If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.
- If you can read this message, you are more blessed than over 2 billion people in the world that cannot read at all.